

<b>POLICE/SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT</b>		<b>GENERAL ORDERS</b>	
<b>SUBJECT: Missing Persons</b>		<b>NUMBER: 2-10</b>	
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 1999</b>		<b>REVIEW DATE:</b>	
<b>AMENDS/SUPERSEDES: GO 2-10, January 1988</b>		<b>APPROVED: _____ Chief of Police/Sheriff</b>	
<b>CALEA STANDARDS: 41.2.5</b>		<b>VLEPSC: ADM.25.10</b>	

## **NOTE**

This order is for internal use only, and does not enlarge an officer's civil or criminal liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third-party claims. Violations of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

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## **INDEX WORDS**

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## **I. POLICY**

People are reported missing for many reasons: some people leave home voluntarily for personal reasons; some missing persons reports are unfounded; and some people may disappear for unexplained reasons but under suspicious circumstances. The role of the responding officer, however, is critical in identifying the circumstances surrounding missing persons and in identifying persons at risk. Each officer shall conduct thorough investigations of missing persons, with particular care in instances involving missing children and those who through mental or physical impairment cannot care for themselves. Each officer, therefore, shall prepare necessary reports and request appropriate VCIN/NCIC entries. Each dispatcher shall ensure that the missing/wanted entry contains accurate and complete information and shall avoid unnecessary delays.

## **II. PURPOSE**

To establish guidelines which describe the investigation of missing persons and making appropriate entries into VCIN and NCIC.

### III. PROCEDURES

#### A. General:

1. No waiting period exists before taking a missing-persons report. Further, the initial report may be taken in person or by telephone.
2. A person is considered missing when his or her whereabouts is unknown and knowledgeable persons regard the disappearance as unusual or uncharacteristic.
3. The missing-person report may be deemed critical if the officer taking the report has reason to suspect
  - a. foul play or suspicious circumstances; or
  - b. the missing person may be unable to safeguard or look out for him- or herself, regardless of age; or
  - c. a risk of suicide; or
  - d. a risk of accident (while boating or swimming, for example); or
  - e. the missing person is a mental patient who may endanger him- or herself or others; or
  - f. the missing person suffers from a physical or mental incapacity that may be life threatening if not under care.
4. A report of a missing juvenile should not be assumed to be a runaway unless investigation yields this finding.

#### B. Preliminary investigation:

The officer or other report taker shall gather the following information for every missing-persons report:

1. Name, age, physical description of missing person.
2. Relationship of reporting party to the missing person.
3. Time and place of the missing person's last known location and the identity of anyone in the missing person's company.
4. Behavior of the missing person, including whether the person has gone missing before, and relevant habits or patterns.

5. Recent history of problems or trauma such as illness, domestic violence, substance abuse, history of mental illness, use of prescription drugs.
6. Extent of any search for the missing person.
7. Indications of missing money or belongings.

C. Follow-up investigation:

Following the preliminary missing-person report, the supervisor may direct a search, if necessary. A follow-up inquiry includes the following steps.

1. If the missing person is a child, with a parent's permission and under their supervision, search the child's home, as appropriate.
2. Obtain fingerprints and dental records.
3. Contact the medical examiner's office and local hospitals for injured or deceased persons meeting the description of the missing person.
4. Conduct interviews with persons who were in the area where the missing person was last seen, or who may work in or frequent the area.
5. Conduct interviews with co-workers, family, friends, schoolmates, teachers, counselors, social case workers, or others to help determine whether the missing person might have left voluntarily or was coerced into a kidnapping or prostitution.
6. If abduction of a child by a stranger is suspected, contact the FBI.
7. Following receipt of the initial missing-person report, the dispatcher shall verify whether any of the following criteria is met. If so, information on the missing person shall be entered into VCIN/NCIC. These criteria apply to persons of any age.
  - a. The missing person has a proven physical or mental disability and may subject him- or herself or others to danger.
  - b. The missing person is in the company of another under circumstances that indicate danger.
  - c. The missing person may have disappeared involuntarily under circumstances that suggest abduction or kidnapping.
  - d. The missing person is an unemancipated juvenile.

- e. The person has been missing subsequent to a disaster.

D. Case closure:

1. If a competent adult missing person is located, officers shall advise the person that he or she was the subject of a missing-person investigation and
  - a. ascertain if the person wishes his or her family or the reporting party notified of his or her whereabouts; and
  - b. arrange to notify the reporting party or family member, if permitted.
2. Officers shall inform the reporting party of the well-being of the person who had been reported missing. Unless the law compels another course of action, the department shall comply with the located person's wishes not to make his or her whereabouts known.
3. Before closing a missing-person case, officers shall question the located person to establish the circumstances and to ensure that no criminality was involved.
4. Reports:

A missing-person report is retained indefinitely until the complainant cancels or clears the record or until the missing person has been located.

#### IV. CHILDREN

A. Preliminary:

1. If the missing person is a child, in addition to the questions outlined above, the officer or report taker must ascertain if the child
  - a. may be with an adult who might harm him or her;
  - b. may have been abducted by a parent;
  - c. has previously run away, threatened to do so, or has had inexplicable absences; or
  - d. may be living under abusive or dysfunctional conditions.
2. A search for the child shall examine the local neighborhood with special reference to friends' houses, libraries, banks, local stores, or parks.

B. Schools:

1. Ascertain the name and location of the school the child attends and identifying information on anyone who may be responsible for private transportation to and from the school.
2. With the permission of school authorities and in their presence, search the child's locker. ***[Note: A warrantless search of a child's locker may be impermissible. Contact the commonwealth's attorney.]***

C. Case closure:

1. When a missing child has been located, officers shall ensure that medical care is provided immediately, as appropriate.
2. Question the child about the circumstances of his or her disappearance and identify any persons who may be criminally responsible or whether an abusive or negligent home environment contributed to the child's disappearance.

D. Documentation requirements:

1. Officers shall complete the Virginia Missing Children Information Clearinghouse Report, Form SP183, on any child reported missing.